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Michigan House Government Operations Committee

Re: Written testimony in support of H.B. 5470

Dear honorable committee members:

I am writing to urge you to pass a compassionate bill — H.B. 5470 — that would improve the quality of life of Michiganders, including myself, who suffer from serious medical conditions.

I am 62 years old, and I have suffered from debilitating back pain for 29 of those years. In 1977, I worked at Hyland Brothers in Nebraska and was responsible for all ordering and stocking of orders. While working in the basement one day, I reached over my head. In taking a box off the shelf, I went over backwards and my back snapped. I had broken my back.

Five of my discs are blown out, and I've been legally declared disabled and unable to work since 1988. The facets on my spinal cord — which hold it in place — are disintegrating. With my back as bad as it is, the pain never goes away. I don't think you could have any idea what my excruciating pain is like; it feels like someone is literally tearing my back apart. Anyone who has ever suffered as much as I have would hope and pray that it never happens to a loved one. Due to my spinal cord injury, I suffer from powerful muscle spasms. I have flopped on the floor like a fish out of water on many occasions. On more than one occasion, I slid under my desk at work.

At one doctor's appointment, my muscle spasms hit so hard that I slid off of the doctor's table. At another doctor's appointment, after enduring electroshocks for the spasms, I managed to make it to the front desk. While trying to write a check, I went down like a rock. One single day in 2004, I had to be rushed to the emergency room three separate times from unbearable pain that left me on my back screaming. The third time they admitted me for eight days. I have seen so many doctors over the years that I can't seem to remember all of them.

I am writing about H.B. 5470 because I know firsthand that medical marijuana would alleviate my and other patients' suffering. When I lived in Nebraska from the mid-1970s until about 1984, the medical use of marijuana was tolerated. Marijuana is a pain suppressant, and I used it, along with other medications, to help with the pain. It also reduced my spasms. Unfortunately, the prescriptions were of little or no value. Over the years, I have taken numerous medications, including Zydane, Percocet, Roxicet, Nalfon, Decadon, Didlaudid, Vicodin ES, Norco, and Carisoprodol. While some took the edge off the pain, they did not relieve it as much as the medical use of marijuana did, and their side effects were far more severe — including possible death. Marijuana significantly reduced my pain and spasms, without leaving me in a stupor — as the prescription opiates frequently did.

I wholeheartedly support allowing the medical use of marijuana and will tell you that 11 other states have already passed this into the law. The people of Michigan deserve the right to use medical marijuana without risking being thrown in jail. It also amazes me that lies have spread,

claiming medical marijuana is as dangerous as crack cocaine. Give me a break, and maybe your loved ones also. Anyone who has watched someone die from cancer would never want that person to suffer such a horrendous fate when medical marijuana may ease some of the pain. Have any of you known someone who couldn't eat during chemotherapy? Medical marijuana has worked for numerous patients. But, tragically, their spouses had to go out and purchase marijuana illegally; they are made criminals for taking care of their dying loved ones.

I had a friend and co-worker, Jennine, who died a horrible death of cancer. She said the chemotherapy was worse than death and refused to continue it. Her husband had to risk arrest to get her the only medicine that allowed her to eat and that best eased her pain —marijuana.

No suffering patient should have to sacrifice his health to maintain his freedom. And no suffering patient should have to risk her freedom to preserve her health. This is not just my opinion. The American Nurses Association, the American Academy of HIV Medicine, the American Public Health Association, the Lymphoma Foundation of America, the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and many others support patients' legal access to marijuana, pursuant to their doctors' advice.

In the name of compassion — and on behalf of your many suffering constituents — please approve H.B. 5470.